

of sarcoid granulomas and the possible importance of secretory products released from a granuloma in the production of some of the manifestations of this disease. I have also emphasized an old concept, the continued requirement for tissue biopsy to establish the diagnosis of this condition.

#### REFERENCES

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## Medical Practice Questions

EDITOR'S NOTE: From time to time medical practice questions from organizations with a legitimate interest in the information are referred to the Scientific Board by the Quality Care Review Commission of the California Medical Association. The opinions offered are based on training, experience and literature reviewed by specialists. These opinions are, however, informational only and should not be interpreted as directives, instructions or policy statements.

### CT Scans of Lumbar Spine?

#### QUESTION:

*What are the indications for computerized tomography (CT) scans of the lumbar spine?*

#### OPINION:

In the unanimous opinion of the Scientific Advisory Panels on Neurology, Neurosurgery and Radiology, computerized tomography (CT) of the lumbar spine is established medical practice. As a general principle, CT scanning of the lumbar spine is justified when there is a reasonable suspicion of clinically significant disease. This would include a number of disorders of congenital, traumatic, neoplastic and degenerative diseases affecting the spinovertebral axis, both on an intraaxial and extraaxial basis. Neurological, neurosurgical or orthopedic consultation is recommended before initiating a CT scan for such disorders. The frequency of serial scanning should be controlled by proper utilization guidelines. Under no circumstances should CT scanning of the lumbar spine be considered a screening procedure.

The CT scan often supplements and, in some cases, may eliminate the need for myelography. CT study of the lumbar spine, alone or in combination with metrizamide, can provide useful information that may not be available from plain myelographic studies. In many instances, both procedures may be indicated, since each provides a somewhat different perspective of spinal pathology. The efficacy of computerized tomography of the lumbar spine presumes the availability of adequate equipment and a procedural protocol.

Computerized tomography has become an effective, noninvasive diagnostic tool in evaluating disorders of the lumbar spine, and its usefulness will continue to increase.